

War Mother

by

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English Translation

by

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A Play in 6 Scenes

Outline

Two dead mothers fight over their son: the mother who perished in the Holocaust and the foster mother who saved the child during the war.

Which one should he go with when his time comes?

Characters

Son (in his *sixties*)

Mother (*a young 20-year-old woman*)

Foster Mother (in her *nineties*)

Foster Father (*a hundred years old*)

Set

Night-time. A bed.

I.

Son – Foster Father

A bed in shadowy light, where the son, old now, is sleeping.

Son– Father! (*a beat.*) Father! (*a beat.*)

(*Foster Father, an old man wearing a threadbare frock coat, appears.*)

Son (*dumbfounded*) – What are you doing here?

Foster Father – Would you rather I went back?

Son – You're not dead anymore?

Foster Father – You needn't be afraid of a ghost.

Son – It's been so long since I've seen you – since you left on the eve of your hundredth birthday.

Foster Father – I remember when you came to our house as if it were yesterday.

Son – I only recall the sound of hurried footsteps. A doorbell ringing briefly. I was cradled in the arms of a young woman I think. We were standing in the doorway trembling. Boot steps thundered in the distance. The door opened a crack ...

Foster Father – The young woman appeared in a flash with a child in her arms. You were two years old.

Son – I was already walking?

Foster Father – Your mother had taken refuge in our house – with you. "Take my child!" she begged. The boot steps marched by, then faded away. You had

escaped a roundup.

Son – I'm the only one you kept?

Foster Father – “My husband will worry,” she said – “Stay a bit longer!” we said. She disappeared, alone, into the night. And never came back.

Son – The Nazis! That's ancient history.

Foster Father – The war has been over for half a century. But it's still a nightmare for you. You called out in your sleep.

Son – You heard?

Foster Father (*nods; and says, aside*) – Last night you had an attack. You don't know it but you're going to die at dawn.

Son – You still come to visit the living?

Foster Father – The border between life and death never held any secrets for me. I was a funeral attendant.

Son – You cut a fine figure.

Foster Father – In my two-horned hat, (*He puts on the two-horned hat with white feathers that he was holding under his arm.*) and richly ornamented black suit, in front of the horse-drawn hearse.

Son – You were the man who helped people cross over.

Foster Father – ... I'm still doing it. (*Holding his ceremonial cane with a silver knob*). I walk softly. And they follow trustingly.

Son – My foster father, always hard at work!

Foster Father – You're not calling me godfather anymore?

Son – You weren't chosen at my birth.

Foster Father – No one says foster father anymore.

Son – I can't call you stepfather. You weren't my mother's second husband. What do you call someone who replaces your father just to save you? I thought you might enjoy having an old word brought back in your honor.

Foster Father – Foster father sounds pejorative.

Son – I think it's unique, fine-sounding. Like a title!

Foster Father – I protected you during the war that first time.

Son – I was lucky not to be hunted down and deported.

Foster Father – The Krauts were sick. Massacring innocent children.

Son – You fought them as a soldier in the First World War, and defied them again in 1942 when you hid me.

Foster Father – ... We're living in a time of peace, and I can do nothing for you this final time.

Son – Will you be the one who comes for me?

Foster Father (*wistful*) – When I rescued you as a child, I felt I was the one who had given you life.

Son (*laughing*) – You're not coming to get me already, are you? (*Lying down again.*) I feel like sleeping again.

Foster Father – I was touched when you called me

“Dad.”

Son – But... I was calling my *father*. Not you.

Foster Father – You know very well he's gone forever.

Son – You're dead too.

Foster Father – But not annihilated. (*A beat.*)

Son – You led the living to the land of the dead!

Foster Father – I wasn't the one who led your people to their fate.

Son – You're just making excuses.

Foster Father – I wasn't able to pay the final tribute to your father and mother.

Son (*ironic*) – They wouldn't have been dead otherwise!

Foster Father – They had no burial place. It's as if I'd been of no use to anyone. It's still my greatest failure.

Son – It didn't stop you from living to be nearly a hundred.

Foster Father – Why don't you just say I stole all those years from them for myself!

Son (*standing up.*) – Why didn't you and my foster mother ever have children?

Foster Father – (*A beat*) ... She didn't want any.

Son – Then why did she want me? (*A beat.*)

Foster Father – She was afraid – of having a child.

Son – But having me was just as dangerous.

Foster Father – She was afraid of dying – like her own mother when she was born (*Bowing his head.*)

Son (*skeptical*) – And she risked even more for a child that wasn't hers?

Foster Father (*nodding*) – We would all have perished if the Gestapo had found you at our house.

Son – You're hiding something from me.

Foster Father – I was very brave in the past. Why should I lie to you now?

Son – You've come to get me!

Foster Father – (.) I've come with ... guess who?

Son – Nobody.

Foster Father – Alive, I led people to the land of the dead. Dead, I lead souls back to life.

Son – I don't believe you.

Foster Father – Each of us can come back once.

Son – You've brought back my mother?

Foster Father – No, your foster mother!

Son – It's my mother I want.

Foster Father – No one has seen her since she brought you to us.

Son – Go find her!

Foster Father – If I only knew where!

Son – I call my father and you're the one who comes. I ask you for my mother and you force my foster mother on me. Are you trying to take their place for good?

Foster Father – You're not as welcoming today as we were to you back then!

Son – Go!

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Foster Mother (*appearing from the shadows to the Foster Father*) – Don't leave. I'll lose you, and you'll never come back. (*The Foster Father goes.*)

Son – Don't you want him to bring back my mother?

II.

Son– Foster Mother

(The Foster Mother, wearing an old-fashioned dress, stands very straight.)

Son – Is it really you, Foster Mother?

Foster Mother – You thought it was your mother!

Son – *(A beat)* Foster Father has come to get me, with you! To go with you.

Foster Mother – We couldn't leave you all alone.

Son – I still have time to live!

Foster Mother – Your time is up now.

Son – But I want to see my mother first!

Foster Mother – She left without seeing you again! *(A beat.)*

Son – ... Foster Father didn't dare say it – that he was coming to get me.

Foster Mother – He said: I'll go and get anyone else, but "not him!" Not you!

Son – What good was it rescuing me when he's losing me now?

Foster Mother – On the contrary, we've found each other again.

Son – I'm starving. *(Sitting at the table.)*

Foster Mother *(serving him; in old-fashioned crockery)* –

Son – I hardly remember that first day.

Foster Mother – It was a stormy afternoon.

Son – Wasn't it in the evening?

Foster Mother – It was dark as an oven out.

Son – I remember a light piercing the night.

Foster Mother (*laughing*) – Lightning. You thought it was a cannon! Rumbling off in the distance.

Son – Was it raining?

Foster Mother – Such a downpour!

Son – I don't remember any of it.

Foster Mother – You thought the sky was crying because your mother was leaving. (*She takes out a photograph.*)

Son – A photo of me as a child.

Foster Mother – They were still black-and-white back then.

Son (*skeptical*) – That's not how I looked that day! I don't recognize myself.

Foster Mother – Every snapshot is like a "little death."

Son (*laughing*) – We're not really living. From one minute to the next, we're already gone.

Foster Mother (*a beat*) – You didn't visit my grave.

Son – I tried to – recently. But I couldn't find it.

Foster Mother – The graves are no longer kept up after fifteen years!

Son – I don't know why I never went.

Foster Mother – Is your life so busy?

Son – My mother has no grave.

Foster Mother – So I couldn't have one either?

Son – I guess I treated you like her.

Foster Mother – Are you trying to get revenge on me for her?

Son – I treated you like a mother ... (*A beat.*) Someone whose whereabouts we don't know, or even if there's a grave to be gathered around.

Foster Mother – Not thinking about me at all – is that your way of treating me like her?

Son – I think about you every day. I'm constantly reminded of things you said. My memories are filled with your stories. (*He picks up a little music box on the mantelpiece.*) You said my mother left a little music box with me – Mozart. "*Ah ! vous dirai-je maman/Ce qui cause mon tourment.*" The chimes wound down, the melody hanging on one note like a sigh. And I said: Has Mama stopped breathing? I didn't make it up. It was expressed in your very own words. (*He rewinds the chimes, which play a few measures.*)

Foster Mother – That's not me you're thinking of!

Son – Yes it is. I can see you saying it.

Foster Mother – All I'm good for is reminding you of

your mother. I don't even exist!

Son – But you lived. An entire life! And she, who died so young, should never have lived at all?

Foster Mother – I was never anything but an old woman! I was old enough to be a grandmother when I took you in.

Son – Were you jealous of a dead woman?

Foster Mother – You never called me Mama.

Son – Weren't you taking advantage of her absence to usurp her title?

Foster Mother – I'm the one who raised you.

Son – How could I believe she was dead when there was still hope?

Foster Mother – She gave us no sign of life!

Son – I couldn't be the one to decide she was dead.

Foster Mother – You preferred loving a dead woman to one who was alive!

Son – I couldn't accept her end.

Foster Mother – That's not what I was asking for.

Son – But if I admitted there was nothing left of her when she might still be alive, it was as if I were doing her in myself.

Foster Mother – Her being absent didn't mean I wasn't present.

Son – I was totally faithful, because not waiting for her

would have been like doing away with her myself. Accepting her death would have been making myself an accomplice to her murder.

Foster Mother – To love me was to kill her?

Son – To betray her ...

Foster Mother – But I wasn't trying to turn you away from her.

Son – I loved you. But I couldn't allow it. Not to her detriment ...

Foster Mother – You were smothering me inside you.

Son – No one was sure about anything. She could have shown up at any time!

Foster Mother – Back from Auschwitz?!

Son – There were survivors.

Foster Mother – Of the thousand people in her train, only four men came back.

Son – Not my father!

Foster Mother – There were no women, much less children. I treated you like my own.

Son – But you didn't want children!

Foster Mother – It was always my greatest wish.

Son – Weren't you afraid of dying in childbirth?

Foster Mother – I risked my life for you! Some war parents were sent to the camps too. Odile Henri and her husband in Saint-Gilles and their thirteen protégés all

died in Buchenwald.

Son— (*A beat.*) Didn't Foster father love you?

Foster Mother — Oh yes, he did! He was very passionate!

Son — Didn't he want children?

Foster Mother (*goes quiet*) — He was very happy to have you.

Son — Maybe he was the one who was afraid you'd die in childbirth.

Foster Mother — No, we tried often. (*A beat.*)

Son — He couldn't have children?

Foster Mother (*bowing her head*) — Maybe there was some incompatibility between us.

Son — Weren't you afraid of losing your own life ... in giving life to another?

Foster Mother — Not any more than I am now.

Son — Did you come back to die?

Foster Mother — You can't come back to life without disappearing forever. I wanted to see you one last time.

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Foster Father (*appearing*) — Now give the kiss of peace.

Foster Mother — I knew you'd come back alone.

Foster Father — I found her. She doesn't want to come.

Son – I don't believe you.

Foster Father – She says that you forgot her, that she's not the one you think of as your real mother.

Foster Mother – I'm leaving!

Son – No!

Foster Mother – You want me to go, and so does she.

Son – You've always sacrificed yourself.

Foster Mother – I can't hold it against you. It's natural for you to want your mother.

Son – How could I be so ungrateful! You're the one I lived with. I don't want you to go. I'll never see you again. You were my mother – I know that now. She gave me life, but you gave me your life. (*He kisses her tenderly.*)

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Mother (*appearing suddenly*) – No, it's her death she's giving you!

Son – Where did this fury come from?

Mother (*young, spirited and sardonic, in a flowery 1940s dress*) – So lovey-dovey!

Foster Mother (*fleeing, horrified*) – I'll leave you to her. She's come back. My task is complete.

Mother – Such self-sacrifice! Ordinary folk are always so magnanimous.

Foster Mother – You were a great lady, and you used to speak so humbly, and with such respect. (*She exits.*)

Foster Father (*running after the foster mother*) – Don't go! Not before saying good-bye. (*He exits.*)

III.
Son-Mother

Mother – You should be ashamed. Loving another!
(*She tears up the photograph.*)

Son – She saved my life!

Mother – Not impossible for someone who was alive.

Son – You tore up my photo!

Mother – No, hers of you.

Foster Mother (*she retraces her steps, murmuring to herself*) – Where did I put his picture? (*She sees the torn pieces littering the floor.*) Poor little thing, torn in half. (*Overcome, she withdraws to a corner, out of view.*)

Son (*to the mother*) – You were lucky to find such a good woman.

Mother – I was asking her to look after you, not to take you away.

Son – You would have liked it better if she hadn't loved me!

Mother – She took advantage of my being taken away.

Son – But you weren't there!

Mother – Go ahead – blame it on me!

Son – She didn't know where you were.

Mother – She suspected!

Son – She rejoiced at my presence, not your absence.

Mother – She would have been quite upset by my presence!

Son – You're the one who put me there!

Mother – She's stealing a child from a dead woman!

Son – Aren't you glad I didn't lose everything, despite your loss?

Mother – A mother is the one who must love her son – not a stranger. (*Ashamed of hiding, the Foster Mother exits.*)

Son – But I didn't have a mother anymore.

Mother – How did you know?

Son – I know that I know nothing about you.

Mother – I can tell you about your birth.

Son – But that's all.

Mother – Yes that's all. And the rest is nothing.

Son (*mocking*) – You were the mother who carried the child for her ...

Mother (*breaking down*) – It's so awful of me. She could have died for you! (*The Foster Mother reappears, but remains hidden.*)

Son – How did you happen to take me to them?

Mother – No. Not that.

Son – I want to know.

Mother (*derisively*) – That would really set everything straight!

Son – Tell me. Talk to me.

Mother – I was in a panic. I'd seen the truck blocking off the street. The soldiers wearing helmets everywhere. We couldn't get back to our house. I turned the corner with you. I rang the first doorbell in sight. I took the risk. The man yelled for us to come in. I was even more afraid that he'd turn us in. We heard the hellish noise of the truck driving by. I said thank you. You're not leaving? they said. I saw that she wanted to keep you. She was touched by you. I realized there was no room for me. I said your father would be home from work and starting to worry. I was afraid to go back out. You were dozing.

Son (*looking pale*) – You could have hidden yourself instead of me. You had no time to find a hiding place.

Mother – What good did it do dying for you? You don't remember anything. I'm dead in every way.

Son (*suffocating*) – I need some air... (*Feverishly takes off his striped pajamas and gets dressed.*)

Mother – Had enough of me already?!

Son (*sits down; sweetly*) – How could you part from me like that?

Mother (*miffed*) – Say I didn't love you!

Son – Were you so sure I was doomed to die?

Mother – What do you think – that they were taking the

children to a work camp?

Son – The fathers were the conscripted ones. Perhaps the Nazis didn't want to separate households.

Mother – Compulsory labor for non-Jewish men didn't mean forced exile for their wives and children. Only Jews and Gypsies were deported as families.

Son – Men of all countries who refused to work for the Nazis were hunted down.

Mother – Resistance fighters were tortured and shot. But their families usually weren't harmed.

Son – Then there was no reason to worry about the children's fate.

Mother – So they were cramming the children of Israel into cattle cars not to send them to the slaughter?

Son – You've said too much and yet not enough.

Mother – If a mother felt she had to part with her child, it's because she was convinced he was in danger.

Son – You abandoned me the first chance you had!

Mother – False son!

Son – It was a godsend! For you to get rid of me!

Mother (*in a lifeless voice*) – I wanted to come back to get you the next day! Then they came and took me away!

Son – You had no other children. You didn't want to have children.

Mother – Believe it or not, they didn't leave me any

choice in the matter. But since I'm so unwanted here ...
(*She starts to exit.*)

Son – You're abandoning me all over again.

Mother – You want nothing to do with me. Neither does she, your foster mother. I'm interfering!

Son – Without you I wouldn't exist. Without her either.

Mother – All you've known of me is my death. And you've spent nearly your whole life with her. She's unbeatable!

Son – You shouldn't hold it against her.

Mother – I left you with her at your birth. So I can leave you with her at your death. (*She exits.*)

Son (*holding her back*) – Forgive me.

Mother (*struggling*) – That's too easy.

Son – You've always been my mother. Your substitute knows that as well as you.

Mother (*sniggering*) – The “acting” mother...

Son – With you gone, she was your body, and you her soul. (*He kisses her tenderly.*)

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Foster Mother (*suddenly popping out of her hiding place, furious*) – So a foster mother has no soul! And you have no heart!

Mother – Foster father! Please, take me to my husband.

Foster Mother – She's leaving with my man!

Mother – Foster father! I beg you.

Foster Father (*emerging from the shadows, to the mother*) – I shall try to find him for you, Ma'am, and bring him back.

Son – I want to come with you!

Foster Father – You, wait here. (*He exits.*)

Son (*following him from a distance...*)

IV.

Mother – Foster Mother

Mother – Why you? Why were you allowed to live?
(*Lighting a cigarette.*)

Foster Mother – I'm dead, like you.

Mother – You were lucky to enjoy my son's presence,
Madam! All I was good for was to give birth, like a beast
...

Foster Mother – You can drop the "Madam."

Mother – Pain is all a Jewish woman ever knows.

Foster Mother – Death is often a deliverance.

Mother – The women who died at Auschwitz are not at peace. They are innocents who feel guilty, treated worse than criminals by the SS! Wounded, shunned, cast out, doomed. Not having done anything bad, they live in remorse, even in death. (*Stubbing out her cigarette butt.*)

Foster Mother – I would have been so happy to see you return!

Mother – Liar!

Foster Mother – What – you're saying I was glad about your suffering?

Mother – Secretly you were gloating about keeping my son!

Foster Mother – We always cherished the wild hope of seeing you again.

Mother – You mean the fear!

Foster Mother – It's unfair of you to hate me.

Mother (*derisively*) – They smothered my screams!
And I can't voice my outrage. (*Lighting another cigarette.*)

Foster Mother – I'm not the one who put you to death.

Mother – But you didn't keep me alive in my son's heart.

Foster Mother – I replaced you as best I could.

Mother – Yes ... You took my place in his life, and I no longer existed for him!

Foster Mother – I loved him as if he were my own child!

Mother – You didn't love him as if he were mine!

Foster Mother – He owes his existence to me.

Mother – At the cost of my death!

Foster Mother – You don't know how much I loved you.

Mother – The only good Jew is a dead Jew.

Foster Mother – That's not funny. I kept him alive for you. I would have been happy to give him back to you. Mission accomplished.

Mother (*mocking her, indignant*) – Whereas I failed mine.

Foster Mother – Hiding that child was a crime. I could have been deported.

Mother – But you weren't.

Foster Mother – (*A beat. Her head bowed*) ... It's true, if you'd come back I would have been sick at heart to lose him. But I knew my own suffering could never have equaled what you endured.

Mother (*mocking*) – Such fine sentiments!

Foster Mother – I did everything to protect your child, to satisfy his needs and make the waiting less traumatic.

Mother – So he could live as if nothing had happened! As if I had never existed! As if he had never had a mother!

Foster Mother – What do you want from me? For me to die?

Mother – You didn't just go up in smoke at the age of ninety. You left this life peacefully.

Foster Mother – What do you want in the end? To do away with me?

Mother – You can't kill a dead woman.

Foster Mother – To erase me from his memory?

Mother – He'll always believe you're his mother!

Foster Mother – He thinks about you all the time.

Mother – But you're the one he sees.

Foster Mother – A son fought over by two mothers, like Solomon's child.

Mother – And you're the true one who doesn't want

him to be cut in two!

Foster Mother – You're the one who brought him to me!

Mother – You get to play the hero. And remain dignified. The poor are so upstanding. I'm in excruciating pain! And my jealousy makes me suffer even more – while you can be so understanding and play the generous one. You had his love. You're full of his tenderness and sure of his affection.

But I have to beg for life and grovel around for a little consideration. I'm unbearable to myself and to others. It would have been better if I had never existed for anyone, then everything would be right and I wouldn't be a spoilsport who's an even bigger killjoy than a foster mother!

Foster Mother (*rocking her in her arms*) – There, there, take it easy, you're a good mother, you're a good girl, you have a good son, rest on my shoulder a while, come my sweet, come ...

Mother – What on earth must you have thought when I left you my son?

Foster Mother – I admired you. Being so brave.

Mother – The boy was so spoiled. I was afraid of his whims.

Foster Mother – You made him understand the situation was serious, not a game.

Mother – I couldn't tell him anything.

Foster Mother – Precisely.

Mother – He dozed off, exhausted.

Foster Mother – I bent over him. You get attached so quickly.

Mother – It was love at first sight. I could tell.

Foster Mother – I thought it was awful of you to take him out so soon and expose him to danger. But I opened the door ...

Mother – The child called out in his sleep.

Foster Mother – By the time I turned around you were already out in the street.

Mother – I didn't think I could ever cry again.

Foster Mother – You mustn't hate anymore. Leave that to other people. You're not the cruel type.

Mother – You're so good. Is that how you calmed him down that first night?

Foster Mother – My dear child, I tried to be as discreet as possible. I felt awkward and didn't really dare kiss him. It wasn't for me to love him. He had to continue adoring you. I tried to be you so he'd have no trouble being with you again. I would have stepped aside and rejoiced at your happiness. I would have been the woman in the shadows of your love. I was in the service of your love. I was your servant. It's true that he became attached to me ... But I thought he needed to remember what tenderness felt like.

Mother (*smiling*) – You're making some of this up

Foster Mother – Can we really remember all of it?

Mother – Keep talking.

Foster Mother – I wasn't myself. I was constantly

wondering: how would she have acted in this situation? How would such a lady have cared for him? You made me better than I am – by trying so hard to be you.

Mother (*soothed*) – And it was that ideal mother you became that was so hard for me to bear.

Foster Mother – I lived through you. I had no right to live myself, and my own existence was so uninteresting.

Mother (*pulling herself together*) – What is to become of us?

Foster Mother – It would be best to just quietly disappear.

Mother – Disappear! (*Wound up.*) You're so sure of staying in his heart! And, once again, I shall have disappeared forever, without the slightest trace! (*She strikes a match to light one last cigarette.*)

Foster Mother – Why can't we leave him in peace, and spare him our torment.

Mother – What's a bit of sorrow compared to the atrocities I suffered.

Foster Mother – I'm not trying to assassinate you. I just want him to live.

Mother – Assassinated! What a fine-sounding word to describe my agony from suffocation, wrapped in the cold darkness that reached inside me, naked and shivering in the bunker where we hoped for water to wash our bodies clean of the sweat from several days of travelling. It was unbreathable even before going in for what we thought was a shower, already stinking of death before the gas, before being trampled on in the panic, trapped, hating my fellow human beings, blind but not deaf to their screams, to our silence, having clawed the

concrete until I was bleeding, trying to find a way out, ashamed to be relieved that the cry of the last child was not that of my own, and despairing that if the same thing happened to him, I wouldn't be by his side.

Foster Mother – I helped you save him from that.

Mother – You were on the right side.

Foster Mother – I mean you no harm. I'm only thinking of his welfare.

Mother – And you think I want him to die?

Foster Mother – His blessed birth comes from you, and he'll remember that his whole life. Why should he think only of your death?!

Mother – Always so kind and gentle! A real daughter of Gentiles!

Foster Mother – I'll leave you now – with each other. You've found one another, and there's no reason for me to remain between you. I shall love you from afar. And you won't even know it.

Mother – You haven't the strength to listen to me anymore.

Foster Mother – Farewell to you, the mother and friend. And to you, the son, dear one. Good-bye! Love one another without me, in spite of me.

Mother – What a fine exit! And I shall remain, nonexistent, like before, heartbroken. My body butchered by hatred. And my screams without a voice. Son, do you hear me? (*Silence.*)

Foster Mother – As long as I was alive you could take him from me. But now that we're both dead he's as

much mine as yours!

Mother – How you must regret that I came back...

Foster Mother – Don't make yourself out to be worse than you are.

Mother – Such a fine soul – refusing to respond to provocation.

Son (*back, alone; in the shadows*) –

V

Mother – Foster Mother – Son

(They don't see the Son, who is standing back)

Foster Mother – If it hadn't been your son, we would have adopted another child.

Mother – Another lie. *(She inadvertently blows smoke in her face.)*

Foster Mother – I've had enough of your insults. *(She opens the window.)*

Mother – You didn't meet the conditions for adopting.

Foster Mother – What do you know about it?

Mother – Your request was refused in peacetime.

Foster Mother – That's nonsense!

Mother – ... You were too poor! *(A beat.)*

Foster Mother *(head bowed)* – I couldn't have let go of my own son...

Mother – But they were deporting children!

Foster Mother – There were so many mothers who left with their little ones. They wouldn't have been torn from them for anything in the world.

Mother – Does dying with your child mean you love him?

Foster Mother – You didn't love him! You didn't want him. You never wanted him!

Mother – You'd like to believe that, wouldn't you?

Foster Mother – Because it's true.

Mother (*closing the window*) – Shut up!

Foster Mother – You tried to get rid of him the minute you got pregnant.

Mother – An unwanted child! Ah, I'm such a wretch! Well, it wasn't quite like that. I was devastated that he was coming into the world – with war about to break out. He was already in danger! I didn't want him to be born into a world where they were intent on killing him. And I felt guilty about that thought. That's really hitting below the belt. I hesitated for a minute – no more. And I still hold it against myself. I was amply punished. I so wanted to have that child with my husband. And one single moment of weakness tarnished my maternity forever. It was out of love that I thought of giving him up, and you dare to accuse me! I entrusted you with my child. But I'm withdrawing that trust. And I forbid you to see him ever again.

Foster Mother – Sorry ... but you still have top billing. You were dead, but loved as if you were alive. Absent, but more present than I. I had to do all the chores. You, the lady, had all the pleasure.

Mother (*outraged*) – ... And all the honors!

Foster Mother – You were sacrificed as a woman, and I as a mother. No one ever thanked me. I was just dismissed. But without me, you're nothing. Everything he knows about you he's heard from me. Knowing me is the only way he could acknowledge you. You don't exist. In fact, all he can ever remember is me.

Mother – You didn't even have the courage to give life. When your husband made love to you, you thought it was going to kill you.

Son (*devastated, walking up*) –

Foster Mother – Poor child, what are you doing here?

Son – Foster Father has gone. He didn't want to take me with him.

Foster Mother – I'll not come anymore. I'll leave you to your mother. She needs you more than I do. I had you all to myself when I was alive. She must have you all to herself in death.

Mother (*to the Foster Mother*) – You always come up with all the right reasons. Because you're afraid of being who you really are.

VI.

Mother – Foster Mother – Son – Foster Father

Foster Father (*appears. To Foster Mother about to exit*) – Don't think you can make fate change its course. You know very well we came to get him. It's time.

Son – You're not my father.

Foster Father – I'm not the father who gives life. I'm the father who gives death.

Son – You came back without him!

Foster Father – No one knows where he is...

Foster Mother – ... That's what extermination is!

Son (*pointing to his mother*) – What about my mother?

Foster Father – They needed one or the other as a witness to the annihilation.

Son – They could even kill in death?

Mother (*exiting*)–

*

Son – Stay, Mother.

Mother (*stops*) – As I was leaving, I wanted to take you back. – “No, it's too dangerous!” They told me. – “But I can't abandon him.” – He's with us, they seemed to say. – “I don't want to leave him.” – “Think of him,” said the old woman. – “He's my child. I want him to be with me.” – “You don't really believe that,” said the old man, “you know he has to stay here.” I took you in my arms. But you were heavy. I couldn't have carried you all the way home. And I didn't have the heart to wake you up and drag you through the streets. “I wouldn't give my trust just like that either,” said the old

man. ‘‘If you want me to, I’ll carry him home for you.’’
That’s how he won me over. And I gave you to him.

Son – Take me with you.

Mother – As long as you’re alive, we’ll be apart.

Son – You’re forgetting it’s thanks to my foster mother
that I love you.

Mother – When you’re dead you’ll finally be mine.

Son – So you can give me to someone else again...

Mother – In death you won’t be in any danger. We
won’t have to save you anymore. We’ll live together
forever.

*

Foster Mother (*fading away*)–

Son (*to his Foster Mother*) – Don’t go.

Foster Father – You must choose now, son. Which one
are you going with?

Son – I don’t want to go.

Foster Father – Why do you think I’ve come?

Son – I called my father!

Foster Father – Did you really think I could bring him
back to life?

Son – Are you taking me to the land of the dead?

Foster Father – I was given no choice.

Son – Is it the day of my death already?

Foster Father – If you hadn't said anything, you'd be with your foster mother and me – like before! But because of your whims, I had to go looking for your mother. And now you don't know if you should go with one or the other.

Son – The easiest thing would be to let me live.

Foster Father – Why don't you just say I'm the one who's killing you!

Son – Going with you means living in the afterlife.

Foster Father – Going with your mother means landing in the nothingness that we saved you from.

Son – You came to save me again!

Mother (*exiting silently and furtively*) –
*

Foster Father (*to the Son*) – Make up your mind!

Son – Is this the last time I'll see you?

Foster Father – Yes.

Son – But you can come back as often as you like.

Foster Father – This was my last mission. I'm going into eternal retirement.

Son – You brought my Foster Mother to hide the fact that I was going to pass ... away.

Foster Father – Come!

Son – I can't leave my mother all alone.

Mother (*gone*)–

Son (*loosening his collar*) – I'm so thirsty! Where on earth is she?

Foster Father – She was here a minute ago.

Son (*looking around*) – Has she gone forever?

Foster Father – You shall never see her again.

Son – Mother! (*a beat.*) Mother! (*a beat.*)

Foster Father – You have chosen nothingness. Farewell. (*He exits. Foster Mother follows him, crying.*)

Son (*alone*)–
(*Blackout. We hear the lullaby from the music box ... suspended on one note.*)

The End